

*An Interview with*  
**MARJORIE L.**  
**CRABILL**

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*An Oral History conducted and edited by*  
*Robert D. McCracken*

Nye County Town History Project  
Nye County, Nevada

Tonopah  
1990

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**Marjorie Crabill**  
1990

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## PREFACE

The Nye County Town History Project (NCTHP) engages in interviewing people who can provide firsthand descriptions of the individuals, events, and places that give history its substance. The products of this research are the tapes of the interviews and their transcriptions.

In themselves, oral history interviews are not history. However, they often contain valuable primary source material, as useful in the process of historiography as the written sources to which historians have customarily turned. Verifying the accuracy of all of the statements made in the course of an interview would require more time and money than the NCTHP's operating budget permits. The program can vouch that the statements were made, but it cannot attest that they are free of error. Accordingly, oral histories should be read with the same prudence that the reader exercises when consulting government records, newspaper accounts, diaries, and other sources of historical information.

It is the policy of the NCTHP to produce transcripts that are as close to verbatim as possible, but some alteration of the text is generally both unavoidable and desirable. When human speech is captured in print the result can be a morass of tangled syntax, false starts, and incomplete sentences, sometimes verging on incoherency. The type font contains no symbols for the physical gestures and the diverse vocal modulations that are integral parts of communication through speech. Experience shows that totally verbatim transcripts are often largely unreadable and therefore a waste of the resources expended in their production. While keeping alterations to a minimum the NCTHP will,

in preparing a text:

- a. generally delete false starts, redundancies and the uhs, ahs and other noises with which speech is often sprinkled;
- b. occasionally compress language that would be confusing to the reader in unaltered form;
- c. rarely shift a portion of a transcript to place it in its proper context;
- d. enclose in [brackets] explanatory information or words that were not uttered but have been added to render the text intelligible; and
- e. make every effort to correctly spell the names of all individuals and places, recognizing that an occasional word may be misspelled because no authoritative source on its correct spelling was found.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

As project director, I would like to express my deep appreciation to those who participated in the Nye County Town History Project (NCTHP). It was an honor and a privilege to have the opportunity to obtain oral histories from so many wonderful individuals. I was welcomed into many homes--in many cases as a stranger--and was allowed to share in the recollection of local history. In a number of cases I had the opportunity to interview Nye County residents whom I have known and admired since I was a teenager; these experiences were especially gratifying. I thank the residents throughout Nye County and Nevada--too numerous to mention by name--who provided assistance, information, and photographs. They helped make the successful completion of this project possible.

Appreciation goes to Chairman Joe S. Garcia, Jr., Robert N. "Bobby" Revert, and Patricia S. Mankins, the Nye County commissioners who initiated this project. Mr. Garcia and Mr. Revert, in particular, showed deep interest and unyielding support for the project from its inception. Thanks also go to current commissioners Richard L. Carver and Barbara J. Raper, who have since joined Mr. Revert on the board and who have continued the project with enthusiastic support. Stephen T. Bradhurst, Jr., planning consultant for Nye County, gave unwavering support and advocacy of the project within Nye County and before the State of Nevada Nuclear Waste Project Office and the United States Department of Energy; both entities provided funds for this project. Thanks are also extended to Mr. Bradhurst for his advice and input regarding the conduct of the research and for constantly serving as a sounding board when methodological problems were worked out. This project would never have

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Jean Charney served as administrative assistant, editor, indexer, and typist throughout the project; her services have been indispensable. Louise Terrell provided considerable assistance in transcribing many of the oral histories; Barbara Douglass also transcribed a number of interviews. Transcribing, typing, editing, and indexing were provided at various times by Jodie Hanson, Alice Levine, Mike Green, Cynthia Tremblay, and Jean Stoess. Jared Charney contributed essential word processing skills. Maire Hayes, Michelle Starika, Anita Coryell, Jodie Hanson, Michelle Welsh, Lindsay Schumacher, and Shena Salzmann shouldered the herculean task of proofreading the oral histories. Gretchen Loeffler and Bambi McCracken assisted in numerous secretarial and clerical duties. Phillip Earl of the Nevada Historical Society contributed valuable support and criticism throughout the project, and Tom King at the Oral History Program of the University of Nevada at Reno served as a consulting oral historian. Much deserved thanks are extended to all these persons.

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--Robert D. McCracken  
Tonopah, Nevada  
1990



## INTRODUCTION

Historians generally consider the year 1890 as the end of the American frontier. By then, most of the western United States had been settled, ranches and farms developed, communities established, and roads and railroads constructed. The mining boomtowns, based on the lure of overnight riches from newly developed lodes, were but a memory.

Although Nevada was granted statehood in 1864, examination of any map of the state from the late 1800s shows that while much of the state was mapped and its geographical features named, a vast region--stretching from Belmont south to the Las Vegas meadows, comprising most of Nye County--remained largely unsettled and unmapped. In 1890 most of southcentral Nevada remained very much a frontier, and it continued to be for at least another twenty years.

The great mining booms at Tonopah (1900), Goldfield (1902), and Rhyolite (1904) represent the last major flowering of what might be called the Old West in the United States. Consequently, southcentral Nevada, notably Nye County, remains close to the American frontier; closer, perhaps, than any other region of the American West. In a real sense, a significant part of the frontier can still be found in southcentral Nevada. It exists in the attitudes, values, lifestyles, and memories of area residents. The frontier-like character of the area also is visible in the relatively undisturbed quality of the natural environment, most of it essentially untouched by human hands.

A survey of written sources on southcentral Nevada's history reveals some material from the boomtown period from 1900 to about 1915, but very little on the area after around 1920. The volume of available sources

varies from town to town: A fair amount of literature, for instance, can be found covering Tonopah's first two decades of existence, and the town has had a newspaper continuously since its first year. In contrast, relatively little is known about the early days of Gabbs, Round Mountain, Manhattan, Beatty, Amargosa Valley, and Pahrump. Gabbs's only newspaper was published intermittently between 1974 and 1976. Round Mountain's only newspaper, the Round Mountain Nugget, was published between 1906 and 1910. Manhattan had newspaper coverage for most of the years between 1906 and 1922. Amargosa Valley has never had a newspaper; Beatty's independent paper folded in 1912. Pahrump's first newspaper did not appear until 1971. All six communities received only spotty coverage in the newspapers of other communities after their own papers folded, although Beatty was served by the Beatty Bulletin, which was published as a supplement to the Goldfield News between 1947 and 1956. Consequently, most information on the history of southcentral Nevada after 1920 is stored in the memories of individuals who are still living.

Aware of Nye County's close ties to our nation's frontier past, and recognizing that few written sources on local history are available, especially after about 1920, the Nye County Commissioners initiated the Nye County Town History Project (NCTHP). The NCTHP represents an effort to systematically collect and preserve information on the history of Nye County. The centerpiece of the NCTHP is a large set of interviews conducted with individuals who had knowledge of local history. Each interview was recorded, transcribed, and then edited lightly to preserve the language and speech patterns of those interviewed. All oral history interviews have been printed on acid-free paper and bound and archived in Nye County libraries, Special Collections in the James R. Dickinson

Library at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, and at other archival sites located throughout Nevada. The interviews vary in length and detail, but together they form a never-before-available composite picture of each community's life and development. The collection of interviews for each community can be compared to a bouquet: Each flower in the bouquet is unique--some are large, others are small--yet each adds to the total image. In sum, the interviews provide a composite view of community and county history, revealing the flow of life and events for a part of Nevada that has heretofore been largely neglected by historians.

Collection of the oral histories has been accompanied by the assembling of a set of photographs depicting each community's history. These pictures have been obtained from participants in the oral history interviews and other present and past Nye County residents. In all, more than 1,000 photos have been collected and carefully identified. Complete sets of the photographs have been archived along with the oral histories.

On the basis of the oral interviews as well as existing written sources, histories have been prepared for the major communities in Nye County. These histories also have been archived.

The town history project is one component of a Nye County program to determine the socioeconomic impacts of a federal proposal to build and operate a nuclear waste repository in southcentral Nye County. The repository, which would be located inside a mountain (Yucca Mountain), would be the nation's first, and possibly only, permanent disposal site for high-level radioactive waste. The Nye County Board of County Commissioners initiated the NCTHP in 1987 in order to collect information on the origin, history, traditions, and quality of life of Nye County

communities that may be impacted by a repository. If the repository is constructed, it will remain a source of interest for hundreds, possibly thousands, of years to come, and future generations will likely want to know more about the people who once resided near the site. In the event that government policy changes and a high-level nuclear waste repository is not constructed in Nye County, material compiled by the NCTHP will remain for the use and enjoyment of all.

—R.D.M.

This is Robert McCracken talking to Marjorie Crabill at her home in Gabbs, Nevada, April 16, 1990.

## CHAPTER ONE

RM: Marge, why don't you start off by telling me your name as it reads on your birth certificate.

MC: My birth name is Marjorie Louise Johnson.

RM: When and where were you born?

MC: I was born in Los Angeles, California, and my parents were Mildred and Henry Johnson.

RM: And what was your birthdate?

MC: April 7, 1917.

RM: What was your mother's maiden name?

MC: Mildred Irene Lenora Bly.

RM: Do you know her birthdate and place?

MC: She was born April 21, 1897.

RM: Was she born in L.A.?

MC: Yes, I believe she was. We were both Daughters of the Golden West.

RM: And what was your father's full name?

MC: His full name was Albert Henry Johnson. He was born in Battleground, Washington, and spent most of his early years in the Washington and Oregon areas.

RM: What was his birthdate, do you recall?

MC: He was 5 years older than my mother; he was born April 4, 1892.

RM: What was your father's occupation?

MC: He had many occupations. He worked in the theater industry making those fancy ceilings and so forth that they had in theaters. And he made

sets. He built and did stucco work with concrete, that type of thing. That was in his early years. He was a master machinist and, in fact, taught lathe work, etc., for a time at Frank Wiggins Trade School in Los Angeles.

In his later years he worked in the mines around Rosamond, California; he advanced to the manager of the mine and then went to Ruth Mine above Trona, California, where he was the mine manager. Then he came to Nevada and worked for some time here in the plant before he retired.

RM: You didn't grow up in L.A. then, did you?

MC: No, [only] the first 9 years of my life. Then we moved to a homestead out of Rosamond, California.

RM: Now where is Rosamond?

MC: It's between Mojave and Lancaster. It's now one entranceway to Edwards Air Force Base.

RM: What took you up there?

MC: During a depression earlier, my father had lost his home in Los Angeles, which he had built every bit himself. And he decided that no one could take away a homestead. At that time he was working away on construction and Mother and 3 of us children went up there and homesteaded out of Rosamond about 5 miles.

RM: Were you the oldest of the children?

MC: Yes, I was.

RM: Do you want to give your brothers' or sister's names?

MC: My sister's name is Eleanor. My first brother was Albert Henry Johnson, named after my dad - only we called him Al. And then later we had another brother named Donald.

RM: So there were 4 children.

MC: Yes. And of those children 3 of us are still living. My brother Al, after graduating from Stanford as a mining engineer, went to South America and when he was down there he met and married the daughter of an English and Chilean couple and they were at Patino Tin Mine, which was at about 15,000 feet elevation. When they married, they went to Rio for their wedding trip which was, of course, at sea level. When they went back up to the mine my brother contracted pneumonia and died. They were married only 6 weeks. He is buried in Cochabamba, Bolivia, South America. So there are the 3 of us left.

RM: Do your brother and sister live in Nevada?

MC: No. My sister lives in Prescott, Oregon, my brother lives in Ticonderoga, New York, and I remain here.

RM: Where did you go to high school?

MC: I went to high school at Lancaster, California, and upon graduation from there I went to UCLA. It was Depression times and I came back and finished up at Antelope Valley Junior College, graduating with the first graduating class there.

RM: I've lived in L.A. and I'm always fascinated by what Los Angeles must have been like in the '20s and '30s. I sort of think of it as a paradise, I suppose.

MC: Well, I really don't recall too much of that. We lived out at an area near Eagle Rock, which was closer, I think, to Glendale. We lived there until I was about 9 years old, as I said. Then we moved up on the desert.

RM: And what did you do when you graduated from Antelope Valley Junior College?

MC: I got married.

RM: Who did you marry?

MC: Byron Davis O'Dell.

RM: Was he from the Antelope Valley area?

MC: Originally he was from Michigan. He had come to the Mojave area and he had a gold mine near Mojave.

RM: What did you do after you were married?

MC: Well, we lived around Rosamond for a while and, as I said, my father had gone up to this Ruth Mine above Trona, California, as the mine manager.

RM: What kind of a mine was that?

MC: It was gold. In the meantime, my husband had gone to work for Tropico Mine in Rosamond, which was also a gold mine. And the Tropico Mine started the Ruth Mine up there. So my husband worked there a while after having worked another mining lease with a man called John Davis. This was up on the mountain overlooking Death Valley near Skidoo. I went with him up there for a while.

RM: What mine was it? Do you remember the name?

MC: It was just a lease, not far from Skidoo. In fact there were still some old men at Skidoo in the boardinghouse. There was one other lady and I. I think we were about a mile apart, and we used to walk back and forth to visit each other.

RM: Do you remember any of the old characters there?

MC: Oh, I certainly do.

RM: Well, let's talk about them.

MC: One I remember particularly was a man we called One Eyed Charlie. His name actually was Charlie Goedig. And there's quite a story behind



that. When my husband moved me up there - and we'd go home every couple of weeks - he sealed off one end of an old mill and just made living quarters in that so that we could camp out there while they were starting this mine. The first day after we got there, all of a sudden all hell broke loose. The place filled with smoke, everything jiggled around and I ran outside and stayed outside till my husband came home. I was terribly upset. I said, "I don't mind going out to these God-forsaken places but I don't want to be shot to death." It developed that Mr. Goedig was working a mine below where this mill was and he didn't know I was there and he shot off a blast and it came up . . .

RM: It broke through?

MC: Well, it didn't break through but it sent dirt and so forth up. So they arranged a blasting signal and after that, as long as I was there, whenever old Charlie wanted to blast, he rang a bell outside my window and I ran outside and he'd blast it.

RM: Is that right? [chuckles]

MC: But we didn't stay there too awfully long. We were there from October until perhaps February or March of the next year. And then we went down to the Ruth Mine.

RM: Well, what about some of the other characters there? Did you ever meet Seldom Seen Slim?

MC: Not that I know of. There were some fellows there that were working a tailings, I think, and they had a mill there; I didn't get around them too much.

RM: This would have been before 1941?

MC: Yes, it was around '40.

RM: So some of the old men who had originally been in on the Death

Valley boom were probably still there, weren't they?

MC: They may have been. As I said, I didn't become acquainted with many of the men there. Then we were at the Ruth Mine for quite a while - about a year I would say - and the government closed the gold mines because of World War II. And that's the way we got [to Gabbs].

RM: How did you hear about this mine?

MC: Well, we hadn't heard about it, truthfully. The Smith brothers, Gordon and Lindsay Smith, had started a grocery store here. And they didn't have power yet into this end of town.

RM: Now that would be the north end, right?

MC: Yes. And the mill at Ruth Mine had a big Caterpillar diesel generating unit. They purchased it to make power for this end of the town, and my father and my husband were the last ones remaining at that gold mine so they dismantled the power plant from the mill and loaded it on a truck and brought it up here.

While my father was installing the generating plant here, my husband came back down with the truck and said, "Get packing! We're going to move tomorrow." And he told me nothing about where we were going to live.

RM: What did you think?

MC: I'll tell you. We just had "leasing" furniture because we'd left all of our nice things in our home in Rosamond. And we thought we were coming here for maybe 6 months because he was 1-A in the draft. As we came up the Luning grade in the truck . . . you know as you come north, on one side is a kind of sandstone formation with little pinon trees? We'd lived in the desert all the time and I became ecstatic because I thought, "Oh, we're going to live in the mountains." [laughs] And when

we got here it was all I could do not to burst into tears because there was nothing here. They were still constructing the mill, townsite homes were in the process of being built and people were living in whatever they could find to live in: tents, trailers and so forth. And my husband thought that he had done a really good job because between that little red house and [the house where I now live] there was a little tiny shack and it was lined with Langendorf Bread boxes. I could read "Langendorf, Langendorf" all around. And that's all it was - one room with a little lean-to on the front.

RM: And an outhouse?

MC: An outhouse. And one outdoor faucet to get water. And the thing that disturbed me I think as much as anything else . . . at home I'd had meadowlarks that I'd fed. And I had a yard and everything. Here they had just bulldozed off and terraced this place and there wasn't anything. There wasn't any sagebrush, no green and no birds. But I was fortunate. I went to work right away for Lindsay and Gordon Smith in the office at the store. So that kept my mind off of . . .

RM: Is that the present store?

MC: No, there was a very large building there at that time. It was a very nice store. They had almost everything. I went to work for them in November - we arrived here in November of 1942.

RM: Was it cold?

MC: It wasn't too bad at that time. I worked for them until March of the next year and then I went to work on the hill.

RM: By on the hill, you mean for . . .

MC: It was the government operation at that time.

RM: The mine?

MC: Yes.

RM: What was it called at that time?

MC: Oh, goodness. It was Basic Magnesium Incorporated. And it was operated by the government until the end of the war.

RM: Was it privately owned then?

MC: No, not at that time. Originally the ore deposit was found in about 1936 by a Harry Springer and some other gentleman. Basic Ores, with its headquarters in Ohio, operated Brucite Camp and they shipped the raw brucite back to Ohio, where it was processed. The government came in and took over the leases from Basic Ores and they built the mill because they needed the magnesite ore to make metallic magnesium for the war effort. They calcined it here.

RM: Now what's calcining?

MC: They roasted it through upright 14-story Herreshoff furnaces. Then they trucked it to Henderson [Nevada] where it was made into metallic magnesium. That was the reason that it was a very vital plant. My husband then was frozen to this operation, so that took care of his 1-A. He went up to terminate when he got his call from Uncle Sam and they wouldn't let him go. They called his draft board, which was Bakersfield [California], and said he was one of 5 key men in the mill and they needed him.

RM: He worked in the mill?

MC: Yes, he was a foreman. And so we thought, "Well, when the war's over we'll leave." But right after the war was over he became ill and he was ill for a good many years.

RM: What was wrong with him?

MC: He had silicosis.

RM: Is that right? Where did he get the silicosis?

MC: We don't know for sure. Probably from his working in the gold. And another situation developed up here. Sometimes that calcine material would flush. It would come out in a gush and it was very, very hot and a couple of times he got into something like that and it burned the . . .

RM: And he breathed those fumes and that burned his lungs?

MC: We're not exactly sure, but probably it was a combination of the two. So we stayed here because I was able to keep on working and until such time as he was able to go back to work, I needed to.

RM: Did he get better then?

MC: Yes. We were always very conscious of his problem and he lived for some years more. They didn't think he was going to make it, period. But because we were in an area where he didn't have to come in contact with a lot of colds and this sort of thing, we made it very well.

RM: Was he able to work?

MC: Yes. First of all he changed his type of work. He went into the laboratory, which he could handle. And he went to work for maybe 2 hours at first and then 4 hours until finally he was up to an 8-hour day.

RM: How long did he live then?

MC: Well, he became ill in about 1947 and he died in 1970 which would have been 23 years.

RM: And you've remained here ever since . . .

MC: I've remained here. After he passed away, I was administrative secretary to the plant manager and I also had the shipping department for the Nevada operations under my control, so I just stayed. I had a good job and my friends are here. That's why I'm still here. I own my little home and it's comfortable; the taxes are minimal and until such time as I

can no longer drive I'm very comfortable here.

RM: Could we go back now - I'd like you to tell me some more about what the town was like. What was here before the government took over the operation?

MC: There wasn't anything here except a small mining camp up at Brucite Canyon.

RM: Now where is Brucite Canyon?

MC: It's the next canyon over south of the mill and mine in that direction [southeast of my home].

RM: And that was where they originally got the brucite?

MC: Right. And they hand sorted the ore and sent it by gondola car back to Ohio, where it was processed and for the most part made into refractory brick.

RM: Did they truck it over to Luning and then put it on the railroad?

MC: Yes.

RM: Do you know how big the camp might have been?

MC: No, I don't. By the time we came the camp was more or less going downhill and the government was taking over. I think there may have been about 30 people there. The man who was more or less in charge of Brucite Camp had gone back to Ohio and then he returned after the war and became the first works manager of the Basic Refractories plant.

RM: I see. Do you remember his name?

MC: Norman Hanson. He's still living. I correspond with him; he's 97 years old.

RM: Maybe I could interview him by telephone.

MC: Well, you might be able to. He lives in northern California near Madera and he's full of stories.

RM: Now, there's an upper Gabbs and a lower Gabbs, and the residents make that distinction. Is that right?

MC: This is North Gabbs and that's South Gabbs. During the wartime that became the townsite.

RM: What did that mean?

MC: It is where the government built the housing and that's where the employees who could get into those houses lived. And this end of town essentially was the business district.

RM: I see.

MC: There was the store and the gas station. Originally the mail was handled through a window at the store until we got a post office. We were addressed as Toiyabe. They started out calling it Toiyabe because of the mountain range here. But the government felt that it sounded too Japanesey, I guess. Secondly, it was difficult for people to spell, so they changed it to Gabbs.

RM: Where did they get the name Gabbs?

MC: It's named after a Mr. Gabbs who was an engineer and helped lay out the mapping of this area during the time of Fremont.

And when things got really going here we had a dry cleaning establishment, a theater, a dress shop, quite a nice size cafe and a little gaming hall and about 5000 people here during the war.

RM: Is that right?

MC: There was not only the individual houses that the government built, they also had low-cost housing. Later many of those places were moved to Tonopah. When you speak with Margaret Jones you'll find out about that because she moved to Tonopah with them. There was a hotel down in South Gabbs and a large apartment house. And it wasn't just the workers in the

plant site here. They had a full fire department and a full-time guard force round the clock.

RM: They guarded everything because of the defense nature of the work here?

MC: Right. And so you can see, with their families, we had quite a populace. In the beginning the school was in a tent, the church was in a tent . . . later, of course, we developed buildings and so forth.

RM: What was there in South Gabbs when you got here?

MC: They were just building the houses. That's the reason, actually, that we ended up in this end of town. You had to put your name on a list, so my husband went up to put his name on the list and there were 60 houses built and we were number 61 on the list. They had low-cost units which were like quadruplexes. They said, "Well, if you want to get in one you can take a quadruplex. You're 61 on a list for 60 houses." We went down and talked in a normal voice between 2 apartments; he was on shift work [and you could hear through the walls]. He said, "We cannot live like that," so we stayed in our little shack here. This house I am in now was here, but it was only half the size it is now. The man who was in charge of construction for the mill was named Mr. Mohme and he lived in this. When he left, we bought this little place and later expanded it.

RM: Where was your little shack, exactly?

MC: It was between this house and the red one.

RM: OK. So it was out where your garden is now.

MC: Yes. In that area.

RM: Who had built the shack?

MC: I think it had been moved in. Mr. Smith had it; we rented it from



them.

RM: Did Mr. Mohme build this house, or did he move it in?

MC: No. This house, in the beginning - the small structure that it was in the beginning - was moved in from Silver Peak.

RM: I see. So a lot of the structures in North Gabbs had been moved in.

MC: At that time, yes.

RM: That was the way old boom camps worked on the desert, wasn't it?

MC: It surprised me to see them moving houses down the road because they can't do that in California.

RM: So when you got here there were a lot of people living in tents and trailers?

MC: Right. The school was in a tent and they held church in a tent. Of course, later they built the school and . . .

RM: Was there a shortage of lumber then?

MC: There may have been in some cases but I think in this case it was a war-time industry; I didn't notice any shortage of lumber. We did, as everyone else, have a [system] of stamps for tires and sugar and shoes and so on.

RM: Do you remember much about that?

MC: Yes. Each member of the family had a ration book.

RM: Children too?

MC: Yes. You could use stamps from the ration book to obtain shoes, tires, gasoline, sugar, meat, these types of things.

RM: And when your stamps were gone, that was it.

MC: That was it. I was very fortunate because there was a lady here who did a lot of baking and she always ran out of sugar stamps, and for some reason I always ran out of shoe stamps. So we'd trade. I'd give her

sugar stamps and she'd give me some shoe stamps. We managed very well.

RM: Was there just you and your husband or did you have any children?

MC: There was just my husband and I until 1953, and then we adopted a boy. We were very fortunate to get him and he's been a wonderful son.

## CHAPTER TWO

RM: Was the town transformed rather quickly from a tent community to a real town?

MC: Yes, it was. When they finished the townsite, as they called it, people moved into the houses. There were still trailers, but the tents disappeared and it became more of a stable town. Of course that stability lasted only until the war ended; then the plant closed down. And with that there was an outgoing of all the people and there were just very few of us left. It went from many people here to very few hundred. It ended up that there were 5 people left at the plant to take inventory and Guiberson Whitewater Cement Company got the contract to inventory and hold the facility until something was done with it. I was one of the 5 left to help inventory.

And then, the old Basic Ore's operation in Ohio came in again and took the plant over from the government. They'd had the ore deposits before and they converted it to a peacetime operation. They built the kilns and we started processing the ore here and sending a more finished product back east. Now the plant is mainly producing chemical products. But at that time we were producing clinkered ore and that went into making high-temperature furnace brick.

RM: I see. Was that what it did originally before the war - went in to make firebrick?

MC: Yes.

RM: How do you make firebrick?

MC: This material was the basis for the firebrick, and to it they would add other components. When it went back east, then they further

processed it. We did not make the brick here. We made a clinkered material and sent it back there where they further processed it.

RM: That was after the war?

MC: That was after the war. Before the war all they shipped was raw material. But now, they don't use it so much in making brick. I guess there isn't that big of a call for it. Now, mainly, the product goes into chemical products - such things as in the processing of sugar . . .

RM: Oh, really?

MC: They use it to de-lime the stacks of the sugar plant.

RM: Do you mean the basic ore?

MC: No, the calcine material.

RM: What was it before that? Was it calcine then?

MC: We made both calcine material and clinkered material, and they still do. But the use of those materials has been changed.

RM: Now, what is a clinkered material?

MC: It comes out of the kiln in a pellet form and it's hard. The calcine material comes out more like sugar or something like that. It's fine; hard burned but fine. You'd have to talk to someone more technically minded than I am [for a more complete description].

RM: Do they still use the clinker material from here?

MC: Yes.

RM: Is it still used to make firebrick?

MC: I don't know that they make much firebrick. They do use some but not nearly to the extent that they used to.

RM: What other uses are there for the calcine material?

MC: It goes into the making of the neoprene rubber they put on the back of carpets and Hush Puppy shoe soles and that type of thing. And it's

used in animal feed products to a large extent.

RM: Is that right? They feed it to animals?

MC: Yes. You know the salt blocks that they use for cattle?

RM: Yes.

MC: If they combine some of this calcine with it then the cattle will get magnesium also.

RM: No kidding. I guess it's all magnesium, isn't it?

MC: It is all magnesium - just in different different forms. Brucite is magnesium hydroxide - it has a water crystal - and magnesite is magnesium carbonate.

RM: And they have both here?

MC: Yes - but not so much brucite anymore.

RM: Is it mined out?

MC: Just about. They do have lots of magnesium. It also goes into making oxychloride cement. If you've been in a bank that has terrazzo floors . . . they used an oxychloride cement in making that and we produce that here.

RM: Is that right? Is this one of the big deposits in the country or the only one or anything like that?

MC: Yes. It is not the only one, but it is one of the most predominant ones.

RM: So the mine was shut down for a period after the war?

MC: Yes, until Basic of Ohio came back in and started it up again.

RM: And what was the work you were doing for the government during the war?

MC: I started out in the purchasing and warehousing department in inventory control, making purchase orders for materials - that type of

thing. Just as you would do now. But heavens, in those days we did it by hand in ledgers. Whereas now it's entirely different. After Basic Refractories came back in after the war was over and they took it over as a private industry plant, I went to work for Mr. Hanson as his secretary and I was the secretary to the works manager until I retired.

RM: When was that?

MC: I retired in '85.

RM: So from around '48 or '49, when they opened the plant, to '85, you were the secretary to the manager?

MC: To 7 different works managers.

RM: So when they'd get a new manager, you stayed on.

MC: Right.

RM: Then you were on the inside of the whole operation - you saw it from the manager's perspective all those years.

MC: Yes. And during that time I also had the shipping department.

RM: Well, after the plant closed down after the war there was a depopulation of Gabbs, wasn't there?

MC: Right.

RM: And then Basic came in again and then what happened?

MC: And then gradually people were hired and the town started to grow again. But we never have reached much over 1000 people. I think probably now we're at about that [population] - everything in town right now is full. At one time I would say we were dropped down as low as perhaps 300 people.

RM: When was that?

MC: Immediately after the war. After the war ended we did not ship to Henderson. In fact, until Basic Refractories came back in there was no

production here at all (during the interim period). When Basic Refractories came in and took the plant over as a private operation, then we started mining the magnesium - and some brucite, too - and shipping it back east.

RM: So you've got 2 ores here - magnesite and brucite.

MC: Yes. But they're both magnesium. And the brucite deposit is pretty nearly depleted.

RM: And it's the brucite you make clinkers from?

MC: No. We make it from magnesite. We make everything from magnesite ore now.

RM: OK, they don't even mine brucite now?

MC: No. They have some left and they use it sometimes but mainly it's a magnesite operation.

RM: Do you know very much about the trucking operation? I've always been fascinated by that - how they got the ore to Henderson. It's a long way down there.

MC: The trucking operation is what put Wells Cargo on the map. They transported the calcine material in the tank-type trucks between Gabbs and Henderson.

RM: Was it a liquid?

MC: No. But it flows like liquid. It's a very fine material.

RM: Oh, so you processed it here to the point where it was granular and it would just flow from these tank trucks, then?

MC: Right. They would put it in the tank trucks and transport it to Henderson where it was made into metallic magnesium.

RM: Did they have to build special trucks for it or anything like that?

MC: I imagine they did. I don't know what Wells Cargo did, but I don't

think that they started out with that type of truck. They got those trucks and built them especially to handle that material.

RM: What route did they take to get out of Gabbs? Did they go over to Luning and down that way?

MC: Yes.

RM: The same road that you come in now from Luning?

MC: Right.

RM: There wasn't a poleline road through there, was there?

MC: Oh, they didn't go that route. They went down through Luning and then down [Highway 95].

RM: Was that road paved then?

MC: It wasn't when we first came in here. In November, 1942, they were building that road. It was a brand new road.

RM: How did they get in here before?

MC: Prior to that, it was more or less a little trail-like road. It wasn't a really good road. And the day that we came up here and I was so ecstatic (I thought we were going to move into the mountains), they had road equipment digging out a wider road and then relocating the road. I think the original road went up the canyon floor. And this one, of course, does not.

RM: Maybe we ought to say a few things about the services that were available. Was there water available in the streets? (Because you had a little spigot outside your little shack.)

MC: Well, the Smith brothers had a little water tank up above us here. They had piped water down to their facilities, and that's the way we got water. Then the government put the townsite in. All of our water under this valley is hot; they had to build cooling towers. Of course, then



they piped the water to the houses in South Gabbs.

RM: So the water is pumped from out in the valley?

MC: Yes, they have several wells. We have a different water system as of last summer. The water system was just falling apart after these many years - that hot water is highly mineralized and it caused the pipes to corrode very badly. So the company said that they would assist to some extent if the city would take over the water. They went out between Gabbs and the airport on the east side of the road and they drilled a well, and that is cold water. So, for the first time in all these years we've got cold water, and it's very palatable. The reason behind all of this was that the water that we had been using was too high in fluorine and the EPA was about to shut it down. They had given several extensions.

RM: Did the children have stained teeth here?

MC: Yes. That's why we drank bottled water most of the time. I know of several families in the early days who didn't realize it. Their children drank the water from the pipes and they had mottled teeth. Strong teeth, but very mottled.

RM: So the water came from out in the valley originally and then they pumped it up here?

MC: Yes. It went through cooling towers, but it never was really cool. Before the cooling tower was in . . . the first thing I did when I came here - I couldn't stand the bleakness - was to plant some rose bushes. And I didn't think - I watered them and cooked them.

RM: Is that right? It was that hot.

MC: It was really hot. In the summertime you put that water into your hot water heater, but with no flame, and let it cool down enough so you

could take a shower.

RM: Did people ever use it to heat their houses?

MC: No. It had been discussed that this would be a very feasible way to heat houses, except for the fact that it was so highly corrosive. Now, of course, they have plastic pipes and it might be a feasible way to heat your house.

RM: How deep were the wells?

MC: Four hundred and-some-odd feet, I think. I'm not really aware of all the different wells. There were different depths, but they were quite deep.

RM: And when they put in the cooling tower, it was too cool to take a bath in the winter?

MC: Yes.

RM: And that was clear up until last year.

MC: That's right. I think we started paying for water about November.

RM: Before that water was free?

MC: Yes. The company supplied the water.

RM: Whose system is it now?

MC: It's the city water system.

RM: What about the sewer system? You didn't have a sewer system early on, did you?

MC: No, we had cesspools and septic tanks. Then the city put in a sewer system, but only in North Gabbs.

RM: South Gabbs doesn't have a sewer system?

MC: Now they do. We had to pass a bond issue and North Gabbs had to pay for that. Basic Incorporated still owned a lot of the houses down there and they had an Imhoff system down below the townsite.

RM: Now, what's an Imhoff system?

MC: It's a sewage disposal system. They used that system for a while and their people did not have to pay for the bond issue. Now, the sewer system has been expanded. They've made a couple more lagoons and the town area - South Gabbs - is now hooked into the city sewer system.

RM: When did they first put in the sewer system for North Gabbs? What year would that have been?

MC: Oh, goodness. I'm trying to think how long I've been paying on that bond. I think about 15 years ago - that would be in 1975.

RM: You mentioned that what brought you up here initially was the Caterpillar diesel engine. So they installed that and then you had electricity?

MC: Then later - and not too much later, either - they brought in the electricity.

RM: How did the original power source work here? Was it pretty primitive, compared to what you were used to?

MC: I had power all the time. The way that the power system worked down in the mining area that we came from - and I think when we first came here - was that it ran all day. Then at some time in the evening they would shut it off. When we were at the mine, they shut it off after the 10:00 news every night. But I can't recall . . . here they must have had it going all the time because he had his little store and his bar and so forth there. It didn't make that much difference.

RM: And then during the war they brought power in?

MC: Yes. In fact, they had power already down in the southern part of the town because they were building the houses and they had power up at the plant. It was just this little North Gabbs area that had no power.

RM: Was it Sierra Pacific Power Company?

MC: We had Valley Power Company, which was more or less owned by Basic Refractories after the war until Sierra Pacific Power took it over.

RM: The power wasn't generated here though, was it?

MC: No, I think they brought it in from Tonopah.

RM: Oh really? And it came over the poleline, I'll bet.

MC: Yes, I imagine so.

RM: What about telephone service? Did you have that here then?

MC: [chuckles] We had one phone in the bar. If anybody received a phone call, they would write it up on the blackboard in the bar - "Call somebody back," you know. And if it was an emergency the sheriff would come and tell you, "You've got to call somebody," and you'd go down to the bar and make your call.

RM: Where did the phone line go from here?

MC: I don't know that.

RM: When did you finally get telephone service for each person?

MC: Oh goodness. I would say in the late '40s.

RM: After the war?

MC: Yes.

RM: Did they pave the road going to Luning immediately after they finished it?

MC: Yes they did, because they had to take those heavy trucks over it.

RM: And the road was paved all the way to Las Vegas at that time, wasn't it?

MC: Yes.

RM: Did the truck drivers live here?

MC: No. Most of them lived in Luning or Mina.

RM: Now, you went to work after the war for the head of the operation here. Who was the first person that you worked for, again?

MC: Norman Hanson.

RM: Could you tell me a little bit about him?

MC: As I said, he's still living. He's about 94 years old. He's very sharp, mentally. He had come here from the Ohio operation. In fact, he had also worked out here when it was just a brucite camp, on the raw ore materials. And he was quite a politician. A very nice man.

He likes to tell the story of the time that he was here in the '30s and they had a terrible snowstorm about 3 feet deep. Nobody was to go out of camp, but one fellow decided that he had to get out of camp and go to Luning. So he started out and they found him frozen to death. That's one of Mr. Hanson's favorite stories about the things that happened here in the early days.

RM: I bet that was 1937 - that was the year the Big Smoky Valley got snowed in.

MC: Oh. It probably was.

RM: How long did Hanson stay here as the head of the operation?

MC: It was when we got Dave. David came along in '53. Mr. Hanson had transferred from works manager at that time, down to running what was called Townsite Development Company. Basic had separated the 2 operations - the townsite and the mine. (And we also had Valley Power Company.) I had terminated because I wanted to just raise my son, and when he was about 18 months old, Mr. Hanson came up to my house and asked me if I would go down to Townsite Development Company and help him out of a bind. He had a girl down there and she was apparently behind or something. So we talked, and I said, "I'll help you out of this bind but

I will not work full-time."

Well, I went down there and the next day he fired the girl. And he said, "Now you have to work full-time." And so I made arrangements. My mother and sister were living here at the time and they agreed to watch my baby for me while I worked. I went back to work for him down there and I worked there for about 18 months. Then I went back up on the hill and went to work for the next works managers. I was there until I retired.

RM: What were they doing with the Townsite Development Company? Were they selling off the lots?

MC: No. They rented the houses. And they had their trailer court and we handled, as I say, the power billing and this sort of thing down there.

RM: Were there quite a few men working at this time here?

MC: Yes. And not only was there Basic Refractories, but Sierra Magnesite and Standard Slag Company came in. And then later, during the time that tungsten was so popular, Dougans had a mill out here and a mine.

RM: What was the tungsten mine known as - the Dougan Mine?

MC: Yes.

RM: Was it a big mine?

MC: It wasn't a big mine but it produced quite a bit.

### CHAPTER THREE

RM: When Basic came back in after the war, did the work force increase rather quickly or did it happen slowly?

MC: It was a gradual increase because they had first to build the mill and of course the construction company was in doing that. And they had some of their engineers in from the east. Then as they increased their operation they increased their manpower.

RM: When workers came here did they usually bring their families with them or did it tend to be kind of a bachelor's camp?

MC: During the war there were quite a few single people. In fact, up on the hill near the plant they had a commissary and they had bunkhouses. But as the town became more stable people came in with their families. And of course during the war there were also lots of us here with families.

RM: Was the mine an open-pit operation?

MC: Yes. It's always been open-pit.

RM: Could you give me an idea about how much earth they were moving a day, say, after you went into the manager's office?

MC: No, but it was a lot.

RM: Did you see a lot of trucks on the road, carrying material to Henderson?

MC: There were trucks on the road all the time. They were trucking around the clock.

RM: So you worked for Hanson down at the townsite.

MC: And then I went back up on the hill.

RM: Was that for another manager or for Hanson?

MC: For another manager - Pat Willard.

RM: And what can you say about him?

MC: He was an engineer and he had been with the company; he was a very thorough, very quiet man, and very good at his work. He had to leave because of ill health.

RM: Was he here long?

MC: Yes, he was. But he later passed away. And the next man after him was Robert Gates.

RM: Roughly when did Willard leave? It sounds like Hanson was here until about '56 or something - is that right?

MC: Yes; something like that. And then Willard took over. I can't give you dates because I might be wrong and I wouldn't want anything printed that's wrong. I would say that Mr. Willard was here until perhaps '61 or '62, in that area. And Robert Gates followed him.

RM: What was Gates' background?

MC: He came here from Ione, California, where he had been with Gladding McBean.

RM: And what were they?

MC: Gladding McBean was a mining/milling operation also. He ultimately was transferred back to the Cleveland office. And after Mr. Gates (I hope I'm getting these in the proper sequence) there was a man named Larry Hayes, then I had Mr. Tom Cahill. He had been a mining engineer working here - you may well know him.

RM: I've heard his name.

MC: He lives in Yerington now. He's been in this country for years.

Then after Mr. Cahill there was Mr. Gary Judd. He lives now in the Reno area. And then after Mr. Judd was Mr. Dunne. I think that makes 7.



RM: And you retired in '85?

MC: Yes.

RM: Who's up there now?

MC: Don Pressey.

RM: What did your duties consist of in working for these various managers?

MC: I really loved my work. It was interesting and I got to be in contact with lots of people. The administrative secretary's job is the same as it would be with anyone else. You handle the correspondence and the filing and reservation making, and when we had social affairs I was in charge of those. I also assisted in projects like when the mine had to make their annual assessment reports; I did those. The shipping department, of course, involved contact with the customer, with the railroads, with the trucklines and making all the arrangements for the shipments whether it be by rail or by truck.

RM: Who bought your product?

MC: Oh, people all over the country.

RM: You didn't have just one big customer, then?

MC: Oh, no. And we shipped not only in the United States, but overseas.

RM: Could you give an example of some companies that purchased the product that stand out in your mind?

MC: Ralston Purina.

RM: And that was for the animal feed?

MC: Yes. We shipped to Venezuela. We shipped to several outfits over in Hawaii that produced sugar. We shipped a lot of material to Alaska Lumber and Pulp to be used in paper pulp processing. They were a good customer.

RM: And this was the . . .

MC: . . . calcined magnesite. Most of our clinker material went to the eastern operations.

RM: To Basic?

MC: Yes.

RM: Does Basic still own it?

MC: Well, it's changed hands many times. Combustion Engineering bought out Basic within the last 15 years, and now Combustion Engineering has been taken over by a Swiss company. This portion of the plant is now in the process of being purchased by a company named "Premier." Until such time as all this is consummated it will still be called Basic Refractories. It's a complicated interchange of companies.

RM: But it's going to have a name change - in all these other changes it kept its name?

MC: More or less.

RM: Is there a lot of ore left there?

MC: When the government first outlined the ore body they said they had 50 years' ore reserve. We have gone the 50 years and they still have ore up there. I don't know that it's the same grade material as it was in the beginning. It may have to have further refining than it used to.

RM: And it looks like there's a continuing market for the product?

MC: Yes.

RM: It's the main industry in Gabbs right now, isn't it?

MC: Oh yes. Gabbs right now is sustained by this mining and milling operation and by FMC Gold.

RM: Where is the FMC operation? Is that Paradise Peak?

MC: Yes.

RM: Is Paradise Peak in Nye County?

MC: The plant and the mine are partially in Nye County and partially in Mineral. And then there are other mines opening up here now. I understand that a mill is going to be built at Lodi Valley very shortly. And of course there's Rawhide. We don't know that we'll have many employees of Rawhide living in Gabbs, but it's possible that we could have a few. And Bell Flats. These are all gold operations that we anticipate will open soon.

RM: What about the Corona Mine? I saw that as I was coming in.

MC: Yes. They have really taken that mountain down, haven't they? We do have some people who work at that mine living here in Gabbs but I think the majority live either in Luning or Mina.

RM: And people who work at Paradise Peak live in Gabbs?

MC: They live in Hawthorne, Gabbs and Fallon.

RM: Gabbs has a high school, doesn't it?

MC: Yes we do - kindergarten through high school.

RM: And what about health care here?

MC: We have a doctor here who operates from a clinic. He doesn't have a whole lot of sophisticated equipment, but he's an excellent diagnostician and if there's a problem he can't handle he immediately contacts someone in the field who is excellent.

RM: And he's here all the time?

MC: Yes.

RM: What if a person needs hospitalization? Does the clinic have beds?

MC: No. We have an excellent first aid ambulance service - EMT trained. Usually they take people to Fallon or to Reno. If a person wants to go to Hawthorne, they'll take him to Hawthorne. And if it's a dire

emergency, quite often Care Flight will meet the ambulance en route. Just this past week we lost one of our dear friends here and the ambulance was going in and the Churchill County ambulance was coming this way so that they could meet. They have a very good system of communication.

RM: Where was the first post office when you got here?

MC: The mail came in and was handed out through a window in the store. And then later they put the post office across the street just about in the area where it is now.

RM: When Gabbs was kind of at its peak during the war, what were the establishments in town?

MC: Well, Jack Nunn and his wife had a dry cleaning establishment. The Smith brothers, who owned the store and owned practically all of this end of town, had a theater. And they had a very nice restaurant. By the way, if you're from Tonopah you may know of the Sorensons. Bob Sorenson's father ran the restaurant here. And there was quite a nice bar along with it. The Smith brothers, of course, had the store. There was a little dress shop but I don't know who had it. And we had a very small library stuck in between the theater, and the barber shop.

That little library has now grown to the Gabbs Community Library. It has been sponsored and operated by the Gabbs Women's Club all of these years. Margaret Jones is library chairman and she can tell you much more about it. I'm on the board. It started out with a collection of books that were just sent in here.

RM: What about other businesses or establishments in town?

MC: Oh, we had a service station, of course.

RM: Just one?

MC: We had 2. We had one up here and one in South Gabbs, but that did not last very long.

RM: Do you recall what brands they were?

MC: Chevron and Standard Oil. The one that's Chevron now was Standard Oil at that time. I don't really remember what they had in the other one.

RM: What did you do about health care in the early days here when you first came?

MC: Well, when we first came here there wasn't a doctor, but shortly after we arrived a doctor came in - Dr. Bibb. He had a clinic up on the hill and he had a nurse. Margaret Jones will tell you that her son is one of a very few children who were born here in Gabbs. So for most of the time we have had a doctor. And in the intervening years, Basic subsidized a doctor. They moved the clinic down to where it is now in South Gabbs and they subsidize him so much a month plus the clinic and so forth. Now, FMC also participates in that. That's the reason that we can have health care here.

RM: What about any other community services that come to mind?

MC: Our volunteer fire department is very excellent. And practically the same people that are volunteer firemen are also the volunteer emergency ambulance crew. That has been operating from the very beginning. Gabbs is the only incorporated city in Nye County. We have a mayor and a city council and a city clerk.

RM: How do you feel that works out?

MC: The reason that we became a city in the first place was that we needed a gymnasium, and we were not getting our proper amount of revenue from Tonopah. So in order to get the money for a gym we incorporated.

And I think, after all of these years, there are some advantages and some disadvantages.

RM: What do you see as the advantages?

MC: Well, we're not under the thumb of county commissioners who never come to Gabbs, for one thing. At one time, we had a commissioner from Gabbs who sat on the board - Bob Cornell. But for the most part, we were way up here at the other end of the county and got very little satisfaction out of Tonopah. So for that reason, I think we're doing well as a little city.

RM: Do you see any other advantages in being incorporated?

MC: No. You might talk to the city council about that.

RM: How about disadvantages?

MC: Right offhand I can't think of any. I'm not a terribly political person so I might not . . .

RM: Are there quite a few people in town who've been here a long time or is there quite a bit of turnover?

MC: There's quite a bit of turnover. Really long time residents here . . . Helen Howerton, Margaret Jones and I have probably been here as long as anyone. And then there are some others who've been here quite a long time, but not as long as we.

RM: Could you name them?

MC: Millie Cornell, Ruth Worthington, Fred Porteous, Ed Alworth (and he would be a good one to talk with, I think) . . . those are some of the ones who could be helpful to you.

RM: So those are basically your old-timers, so to speak?

MC: There probably are others, but right off the top of my head . . . well, now Jim Fortune's been here quite a while. Ed was the master

mechanic for years up at the plant.

RM: Then the other people in Gabbs are people who have come since 1950 or so?

MC: Yes. For instance, recently they had a meeting - they wanted to get a group together and start an annual Gabbs Fourth of July celebration. Some of the younger people there said they'd never had a parade or a celebration in Gabbs, but in the early days we had parades on Labor Day and Fourth of July. We had nail-driving contests and all. You know, during the war you had to make your own entertainment here. You could not get in and out very easily because of the tires and the gasoline and this type of thing. There were a lot of people here, so we had dances - at one time the marine band came in from Hawthorne and we had a war bond dance and gave a war bond for a door prize. I believe Margaret Jones won it - or one of her family. For Labor Days and Fourth of Julys we had town celebrations and contests . . . in fact, Tonopah's drilling contest for the state championship originated in Gabbs.

But when Standard Slag left, here again was a kind of an exodus of people. We had been putting on Gabbs Day for several years and it became almost too much for us to handle so we discontinued doing that and Tonopah asked if they could then take from us the state championship contest for hand drilling and that's the way they got it.

RM: When do you think that happened?

MC: I would say probably 10 to 12 years ago.

RM: Oh, it's been relatively recently.

MC: Yes. We had Gabbs Day for quite a while. But it got to be too much for one company and one little group of people to put on. So the younger people who have come in have the idea that we've never done anything, and

we did. We put on plays, we've had fashion shows and we had many, many community potluck suppers and card parties and this type of thing. When you're in an isolated area and have to make your own entertainment, you do.

RM: Where did you hold these events?

MC: We held them in the gymnasium.

RM: When was the gymnasium built?

MC: The new gymnasium - the one that was built after we became a town - was built in the late '50s. But before that, we had a little gymnasium on the other school. Now that portion is being used as a junior high, I believe. During the time that Mr. Hanson was works manager, he obtained a building from Tonopah and they moved it in and fixed it up and called it the Gabbs Recreation Center. And after that came in, that's where all of these functions were held.

RM: Have there been many community groups?

MC: We have the Gabbs Women's Club. As I said, this started out as the Women's Relief Society - rolling bandages and starting a little library during the war. At one time we were a member of the Nevada Federation of Women's Clubs, but we later dropped that.

RM: Is it still going?

MC: Oh yes. Our main responsibility is the library. And we send girls to Girl's State and have other community functions. Then there's the Masonic Order and the Order of the Eastern Star and Veterans of Foreign Wars. There is the Lions and there was a Lioness but I understand they disbanded recently. Now there's a Sportsman's Club here and they have a shooting range and so forth. And Sandy Bottom Golf Course.

RM: Where's that?



MC: It's out northwest of town. They had an oiled greens - of course, there was no lawn. But it was quite active at one time. There aren't too many who use it anymore as a golf course. I think the younger people are more interested in shooting and so forth. It's all out at the same area. We had an arts and crafts club that disbanded about 5 years ago. And that's about it.

RM: Could you talk about social life in Gabbs?

MC: As I stated, your social life is not dependent on going to the theater or anything like that because there's not that facility here. Your social life is with the different organizations, having dinners and playing cards with your friends, picnicking, going up pine nutting - we go right up here and get pine nuts very easily.

RM: Where do you get them?

MC: Up on this range east of us. There haven't been any for about 3 years now, but quite often there are. And if you want to go to a show or you want to go bowling or something like that you'll go to Fallon or Hawthorne or . . .

## CHAPTER FOUR

MC: They have a Horseman's Organization here. Quite a few of the people have horses that they ride - they have their corrals and so forth west of town. That's quite an active group.

RM: Would you say it's been a very friendly town to live in?

MC: I would describe it as a friendly town. I have been here for many, many years and I've made many dear friends. And as you can see, I'm still staying here.

RM: Right. Were there ever any status differences between upper and lower Gabbs and between, say, executives at the mine and workers and that kind of thing?

MC: Yes there was, and that's too bad. The administrative people lived in the 3-bedroom houses downtown and usually lived on the upper slopes of South Gabbs. And the other people, not quite so high in the administrative positions, lived in the other houses. But I don't think that - with the exception of one or two - they ever considered themselves different from the workers. And they mingled in and participated with the community activities. I didn't feel, myself, that there was a lot of distinction. Some people may have, but I think a lot of it has to do with your own personality.

RM: Your son went to school here, didn't he?

MC: Yes.

RM: How would you describe his experiences in the school system here?

MC: I think he enjoyed his school years here. And he was active in his class. During the summer they've always had a little baseball group. They couldn't join little league because they were too distant from

everyplace, but they had 3 or 4 teams within the town that played each other. He was very active with that and active in sports.

RM: You mentioned there were other companies in here besides Basic. Starting with the war when you first came here, what were the other companies in here besides Basic and what were they doing?

MC: The only other one that operated during the war time, I think, was Sierra Magnesite. They were mining magnesite also.

RM: Were they mining in the same deposit?

MC: Well, just over in another . . .

RM: They had their own claims?

MC: Right.

RM: I see. What were they doing with their ore?

MC: I don't know what they did with their ore. They shipped it to California, I believe.

RM: Was it an open-pit operation, too?

MC: Yes. And then later, when Basic Refractories came in, Sierra Magnesite left and I believe Basic Refractories took over those claims and operated them under a lease royalty basis.

RM: Was Sierra here before you got here?

MC: I'm not exactly sure when they first started operating. But they were here during part of the war years and then not too long afterwards, I'd say up until, the '50s, when they finally left and Basic assumed their claims.

RM: Were there ever any other companies involved?

MC: There was Standard Slag Company. I think now they've changed their name to Standard Minerals, or something like that. But for a long while, they came in and operated some magnesite claims right up here in the same

area. Then in '61 they turned their claims over to Basic - Basic assumed their claims on a royalty basis. So their people left and it was all under one operation.

RM: I see. Did Basic add new people as they acquired these claims?

MC: Well, for instance, when Standard Slag left, some of their employees came over to the Basic payroll.

RM: I see. Were there ever any other companies operating here besides those?

MC: I mentioned during the tungsten boom we had the Dougan tungsten mine. Also active during this period was the El Capitan mine, operated by the Smith brothers, and Hank Baxter had a mining operation and a mill which he built just north and east of Gabbs. That mill has since been dismantled. Standard Slag Company also mined iron from the Stokes property east of Gabbs just beyond the Greensprings area.

RM: Where is the Dougan mine located?

MC: It's located north and slightly east of Gabbs.

RM: About how far?

MC: You can see it out there. It's, oh, I'd say 6 or 7 miles out - that's all.

RM: It wasn't a terribly large deposit, was it?

MC: No, it wasn't. But it was very productive and they had a little mill here in town that they brought their ore into and processed.

RM: Who were the Dougans? Were they local people?

MC: No. They had come in from somewhere else. I'm not sure just where they came from.

RM: You didn't know them too well?

MC: I knew them socially - played cards with them and this sort of

thing. I still correspond with the son and his wife, who now live in the Sacramento area. But I'm not sure where they originated. Part of them came from Canada and . . . I don't know.

RM: It seems you keep in touch with quite a few people who have lived here.

MC: Yes.

RM: Is that just you, or is that kind of a community trait?

MC: I think perhaps I keep track of them more than some others.

RM: How often do you hear from them? A few times a year or so?

MC: Yes, usually around Christmas and maybe once in between. It's not heavy correspondence. There are too many to do that.

RM: But you kind of keep them posted on what's happening here?

MC: Yes. Well, for instance, every year I get a letter from Mr. Hanson at Christmas and sometimes in between and he always wants to know what's happened in the town and how the plant's doing, and I try to keep him filled in. And there are a couple of the others who have been here in past years in administrative positions who call me and we'll talk on the phone for a long time.

RM: That's nice.

MC: Yes, it is.

RM: Were there any other operations that come to mind through the years here either in association with the Basic operation or as independent mining operations?

MC: I think I've named most of the ones that were really active. As I said, Hank Baxter had a mine here and he had a mill which is now gone.

RM: And what was he mining and milling?

MC: I know at one time he was handling tungsten and I don't know what

other mineral he handled. But that was not a very long-term operation. His mill later was taken over by a different group and they took some custom ores, but that didn't last long either. I think I've pretty much named the main operations around here.

RM: Are there ranchers in the area who are part of the community?

MC: Well, yes. There's the Harry Brown family that have a ranch going over toward Austin. But the wife and children move here during the school year so that the children can go to school. They take an active part in this community. In fact, I knew Harry and Katie - that's the parents - when they got married here during the war years.

Then there is the Gabbs Valley Ranch, which is on the road going to Rawhide. As you go back down to the Luning Summit you'll see a sign that says "To Rawhide." The people who are currently there participate in the town activities. There is also a cattle ranch located about 8 miles south of Gabbs which was owned and operated by Mr. and Mrs. Eisner for several years. It has changed hands a few times, but is still operating. Of course the children of the Indians from Reese River Indian Reservation are bused into school here.

RM: How far is the Indian Reservation from here?

MC: I would say maybe 20 miles.

RM: Do you know how many people they have out there?

MC: No, I don't. It's quite a good size, though. And they participate in things that go on in Gabbs.

RM: How about any of other people in the Reese River area? Are they part of this community?

MC: In a way, but not much. They mainly, I think, go to Austin.

RM: When people want to shop here, where do they go for their heavy

shopping?

MC: Most people here go out every 2 weeks either to Hawthorne, Fallon or Reno to do their major shopping. Our little store here is a nice store, but of course they can't carry what a larger store would have. And of course, there are no dry goods or anything like that.

RM: Is there a preference to where people go between Hawthorne, Fallon and Reno?

MC: I think most of them go to Fallon.

RM: Even though it's a little farther?

MC: Yes. There's more to offer than there is in Hawthorne.

RM: And how do you get to Fallon?

MC: By car. [chuckles] We go out on Highway 361 to Highway 50 and then take Highway 50 into . . .

RM: Yes. And that's paved.

MC: Yes - paved all the way. They're good roads. It's a long way in between - 80 miles.

RM: Is that where you've shopped?

MC: That's where I've always shopped.

RM: So Fallon probably feels pretty comfortable to you, doesn't it?

MC: Yes it does. And I have many friends in Fallon. That's where most of us go. And I think the every-2-weeks thing has evolved because that's the way they were paid at the plant, on a 2-week basis.

RM: Is there much interest in sporting here - hunting and fishing and that kind of thing?

MC: Oh, yes. I think almost all of the fellows hunt and many of them fish. I know when my first husband was alive we used to go up in Smith Creek and Stewart Creek and Reese River and fish a lot.

RM: Do people ever go to Bishop [California] much?

MC: Yes, once in a while. But not like the people from Tonopah do.

RM: Speaking of Tonopah, people here don't go to Tonopah much, do they?

MC: No - mainly just if we have business at the courthouse. But other than that there's not much reason to go to Tonopah. It's 120-some-odd miles there and you really don't have the shopping facilities in Tonopah that you do in Fallon.

RM: Are there any holidays here that are really big?

MC: You mean that the town celebrates?

RM: Yes - or that are big in general for people personally. I mean, Christmas and Easter and those . . .

MC: Oh yes. The same holidays as anywhere else. And as I said, we used to have big Fourth of July and Labor Day celebrations. There haven't been such for several years. But now there's a group that's trying to establish a Fourth of July annual celebration, so it may be that we will be back in the celebration business.

RM: Where would you hold the events here?

MC: They're planning on being down at the area where the Sandy Bottom Golf Course is. They're trying to bring in rodeo and this type thing.

RM: Is there a lot of interest in the local sports team here - the high school basketball?

MC: Oh yes. And they have a town team which competes with towns around the area.

RM: Looking back as a resident of the community now for almost 50 years, how do you see your life here and what do you think about it?

MC: Gabbs has been good to me, as far as I'm personally concerned. I wish that we had had a little better educational system for my son and



for the children here. I know they do the best they can with what they have to do with, but it could be better. And there aren't very many amenities. As I said, anything that you do socially, you have to get together in a group and do. You can't go and be entertained at a theater or go to a bowling alley or anything like that. So there's a shortage of that type of entertainment. And the major difficulty - I feel - with Gabbs is our distance from anything. It's 80 miles to go shopping. We mention that to friends from other areas and they can't fathom our going 80 miles one direction - 160 miles round-trip - to buy groceries. So those are the things that are drawbacks here.

On the other hand, I think we form close relationships and long-time friendships which, in a larger urban area, you might not. So there are pluses and minuses.

RM: You think that you do have closer, more long-term relationships in a small community like this.

MC: I think so.

RM: That's interesting. I think that's probably true.

We didn't really talk too much about (and I think it's kind of interesting, particularly in terms from a historical perspective) growing up in the Mojave area where you did. What was life like then and what were those communities like? Because it's changed so, hasn't it?

MC: Yes. It has changed terribly. We moved there from Los Angeles, or the Eagle Rock area, when I was about between 9 and 10 years old. It was a shock to come from a rather large school to a one-room schoolhouse. When we had a play, the men hauled in railroad ties and stacked them up to make a platform so that we could have a play. But then a few years later they built a large school, and it was fine.

Then when I went to high school, the closest high school for many miles around was in Lancaster. And they bused children from Mojave and Rosamond and the outlying agricultural area. I lived only about 17 miles from high school, but in order to get to high school, I rode in that bus 60 miles one way, every day. Because they parked the bus at our house and they would take it across the main highway way out into the farming area.

RM: So you were the first on the bus.

MC: Right. And the last off. They ran another bus from Mojave straight down the highway. At the time that I went to high school in Lancaster they had dormitories and children from the Kernville area up out of Trona and in Trona who boarded at the high school. So that was an experience, too.

RM: Did you get into L.A. much or was that another world?

MC: No, we used to go down fairly frequently, though not as often as people do now. Because as I said, my father was working away on construction and Mother and 3 of us children, at that time, were holding down the homestead. Dad would come home every couple of weeks, and when he did there were always things for him to do and things for him and Mother to go over. But we had relatives in the Los Angeles area and so we would go down for holidays sometimes and things like that.

RM: Do you go back there much?

MC: Not anymore.

MC: Why do you say "not anymore?"

RM: When we first moved up here my husband and I owned a home in Rosamond and we rented it out and we used to go down for that. And then later, my parents left here and went back to Rosamond to retire and we'd go down to visit them. Now my parents are gone and we sold the house. I

have only 2 cousins living in Los Angeles, so I just don't go there.

RM: Do you get out of Gabbs much?

MC: Oh, yes.

RM: Where do you go when you leave?

MC: Many places. Now that I've been retired, my friend Margaret Jones - with whom you'll speak later - and I usually take one big trip every year. We've been to Alaska, Scotland, Hong Kong, Singapore, Bangkok and . . .

RM: Were those all on different trips?

MC: Well, the 3 oriental ones were on one trip. And in March we took a trip to Florida. We do things like that. And then, I'm very interested in ballet and plays and things like that. So frequently we get a group together and go into Reno and go into the Pioneer Theater Auditorium or wherever and do those types of things. Then we're both members of the Order of the Eastern Star and we travel to different meetings throughout Nevada. That's one way that I've become acquainted and made many friends throughout the whole state.

MC: Do you have TV?

RM: We have cable. That just came in a year ago December.

RM: Before that, did you have TV?

MC: Yes, we did. They had a transmitter up on one of the high peaks behind the mine and we received 3 channels from Reno. Two of them were rebroadcasts from the pickup area in Hawthorne to us and one came direct.

RM: When did TV come in here?

MC: Late '60s, I think.

RM: What about radio? Did you use that much when you first came here? Was that a big part of your life?

MC: Right. That's all the communication we had, you know. There wasn't even, as I mentioned, but one phone in town.

RM: Do you remember any of the stations that you listened to frequently?

MC: Whatever came in. Sometimes you couldn't get anything very well.

RM: It was probably only at night, too, wasn't it? In the day you couldn't get it.

MC: Well, and I was working all the time, so I wasn't much of a listener except in the evening.

RM: Is there anything else that I haven't mentioned or have neglected?

MC: Oh, as I mentioned, the street I live on was named after my husband, Byron O'Dell.

RM: How did that happen?

MC: We were the only house on here from the beginning and so they just named the street after us.

RM: But your name isn't now . . .

MC: After he had been dead a little over a year, I remarried; I married John Crabill. We were married about 10 years and then he passed away. That's the reason my name's different.

RM: How did they name the streets here? Were they all named after people, or . . . ?

MC: Well, when you go down the street you'll see almost directly across from this street one called Stanley Lane. That was named after Stanley Chiatovich. There's a road down further that's called Church Street. The reason it's called Church Street is that one of the churches is there. There's a Post Street, and I think that goes behind the Post Office. Laneville Street was named because there was a family called Laneville living there.

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